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WEEKLY REVIEW

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USSR Rejects Western Terms for a Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Soviet insistence on including the North Atlantic Pact and American bases in Europe and the Near East in any agenda for a Foreign Ministers' conference may be a propaganda maneuver -- and may have much broader implications.

On the face of it the Soviet demand, which was unacceptable from the start to the West, was probably made to establish a suitable propaganda position for Soviet refusal to agree on an agenda. Other considerations, however, might have been determining factors. Among these are:

1. Inability to reach agreement with the West might be used to "justify" new moves in the Soviet power game, such as conclusion of a "defensive" alliance between the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and possibly Communist China. In this connection, reports have been received of Soviet military talks with various Eastern European satellites, and of plans to establish a joint military headquarters.

2. An accusation that the West had "rejected peace" might be a useful maneuver preliminary to a Soviet or satellite move against Iran, Yugoslavia, Berlin, or Southeast Asia.

The Soviet propaganda line itself is an indication that the North Atlantic Pact and the question of US bases were injected into the agenda discussions to relieve the USSR of the need to agree to any agenda whatever.

At the time of the first Soviet proposal for a CFM meeting, 3 November, 1950, German rearmament was the chief target of Moscow's propaganda machine. Since then there has been a steady shift of emphasis to the general topic of Western defense arrangements -- presumably reflecting a realization that the growth of Western strength as a whole is a much greater concern than the detail of arms for Germany.

The shift of emphasis also indicates the discovery that Soviet pressures and diplomatic maneuvers have neither split the West nor dislocated its plans for rearmament. The USSR thus would have little to gain at this time from a conference of the Foreign Ministers. The Soviet Union therefore might well consider that its campaign to mobilize "popular opposition" to Western policies, particularly rearmament, would be better served by attempting to show Western unwillingness to negotiate, rather than by agreeing to an agenda which was not slanted in favor of Soviet objectives.

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Russian Capitulation on Berlin Trade Ban Shows Vulnerability to Pressure

Relaxation of Soviet restrictions which had choked off an estimated 75 per cent of West Berlin exports to the German Federal Republic spotlighted the vulnerability of the Soviet Zone to economic attack from the West.

A final settlement of the difficulty depends on detailed negotiations, and the respite may therefore only be temporary, but the Western allies will enter the discussions with a hand strengthened by the success of their prompt countermeasures to the recent "Baby Blockade."

Soviet interference in the normal trade flow from Berlin to the Western zones reached its height on June 18, and threatened to hurt Berlin's artificial economy to a point where some sort of air lift would become necessary. Prior to mid-May the Soviet authorities had been reviewing only as a formality shipments from West Berlin through the Soviet zone to the Federal Republic; then they suddenly demanded that requests for trade permits for most shipments be accompanied by a certificate showing origin of the raw materials involved.

This action was justified as a measure to check the illegal flow of vital raw materials from the Soviet zone, but in fact it bore a striking resemblance to Soviet pressure tactics of the past. Berlin officials, acting contrary to Allied order, at first complied with the demand, then reversed themselves when the Allied order was repeated.

Despite French reluctance to use economic pressure because of the chronically precarious situation in Berlin, the Allies agreed on countermeasures to follow up their two notes of protest to the Russians. These countermeasures included an embargo in West Germany of shipments to the Soviet Zone or East Berlin of certain valuable commodities, notably iron, steel and machinery. The three commandants in West Berlin were authorized to impose a similar ban, and the Allies also acted to hold up West German signature of the latest interzonal trade agreement with the Eastern zone.

British and American authorities had argued that the Soviets could ill afford to impose another blockade at this time, and the view turned out to be justified. Although S. A. Dengin, the Berlin representative of the Soviet Control Commission, insisted on the Soviet right to control shipments from West Berlin, he left the door open for negotiation with the Allies. On June 18 the Soviets capitulated by returning 800 of the trade permits for which certificates of origin had not been submitted.

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Belgrade Increases Its Support of Resistance Operations in Albania and Bulgaria.

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Recent increase in Yugoslav support of resistance operations in Albania and Bulgaria apparently stems principally from a desire of the Tito regime more effectively to counter [REDACTED] activities in both countries.

The activities of the Yugoslav Government in Albania have been sufficiently alarming to bring a protest from the United States. On May 10 an Albanian Refugee Committee, representing approximately 5,000 exiles now in Yugoslavia, was established. It paralleled a similar Bulgarian committee reportedly created in Belgrade in January of this year.

These committees have been charged with the conduct of resistance, espionage and propaganda activities against the hostile satellite regimes. Yugoslav agents are also reported to have contacted Western-sponsored exile organizations, purportedly to obtain political leadership for their own subversive activities. These contacts include a reported approach to leaders of pro-western Albanians in Italy. Bulgarian refugees in Yugoslavia, affiliated with the western-sponsored Bulgarian National Committee, have noted a marked improvement in their treatment by Yugoslav authorities.

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[REDACTED] is probably the cause of the upsurge in Yugoslav support of resistance groups. Leaders of the Belgrade regime have emphasized to US officials their concern that [REDACTED] might give the USSR a pretext for attack on Yugoslavia. This argument is hardly in line with Yugoslavia's [REDACTED] activities, and in reality Belgrade probably wants to keep control of the resistance movements as completely as possible in its hands.

Available evidence indicates that the immediate task of the refugee committees in Yugoslavia is the collection of intelligence on Albania and Bulgaria. There is no evidence that the activities of these committees are well enough coordinated with those of resistance groups inside the two countries to make them a danger to the existing regimes. In addition, Yugoslavia itself is in a sufficiently precarious position to make it improbable that their overthrow plays any role in Tito's current program.

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French Election Results

A middle-of-the-road coalition with little or no change in its foreign policy but some modifications in its domestic program was apparently assured by last Sunday's election. With returns almost complete--614 of the 627 seats in the Assembly have been filled--no political group has received a clear mandate, but the center parties have a solid majority as long as they hold together.

These parties and the independents now muster 389 seats, well over the 314 necessary for a majority in the Chamber of Deputies. They will be subjected to pressure from both extreme right and extreme left, but De Gaulle's RPF, the largest parliamentary group, with 115 seats to date, fell short of its announced expectations, and the Communist representation dropped from 131 to a present 100.

The Communist drop was the most startling result of the election, but the figure is misleading. It was due almost entirely to a special election law designed to cut red representation by permitting parties to form coalitions, thereby pooling their votes. The Communists still polled more votes, 26.3 per cent of those counted, than any other party, and this is only a slight drop from their 28.2 per cent of 1946. Inflation, not subservience to Moscow, is largely responsible for the big Communist following in France.

At the other extreme, General De Gaulle's Rally of the French People (RPF), participating for the first time in a national election, became a potent factor in the Chamber. Its popular vote, however, stands at 22.2 per cent to date, considerably below pre-election claims. Many Frenchmen supported De Gaulle as a protest against the inefficient Centrist coalition, as an antidote to Communism, or because he promised a more dynamic program. The Fascist overtones of the RPF are discounted by most Frenchmen, who do not consider De Gaulle a potential dictator.

It seems probable at the moment that retiring Premier Henri Queuille will be asked to form the new cabinet. He can be expected to call for continued close cooperation with the other NATO powers. His ability to reconcile opposing views may enable the middle-of-the-road parties to continue in power indefinitely.

In the last Assembly, the Socialists, Popular Republicans (MRP) and the Radical Socialists who led the "Third Force" coalition government had depended on the cooperation of some of the Rightist "splinter groups" which now form the "Fourth Force". While this latter grouping was organized primarily as an election alliance without binding post-election commitments, it will probably maintain a loose association during the early months of the new Assembly. It holds the balance of power, since the "Third Force" cannot maintain its majority without help which it is unlikely to get from De Gaulle and certain not to get from the Communists.

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The Radical Socialists, as well as the "Fourth Force", are primarily interested in a financially stable government. They will be forced, therefore, to compromise their desire for a strong, rearmed France with their dislike of increased taxation. The lack of cohesion of the "Fourth Force" may threaten the stability of any cabinet in which it participates.

The first problem of the new Premier-designate will be to draft a program acceptable both to the Socialists and the conservatives of the Right. Since the swing is definitely to the right, the Socialists, who want to continue the general program of the last Assembly, must choose between joining a conservatively inclined cabinet and supporting a right-of-center government in which they decline to participate.

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Vulnerabilities of the Viet Minh

Since the beginning of this year, an increasingly clear picture of lowering morale among the population under control of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) has been established. Of the several factors responsible for this situation the most important are: 1) continuing French military pressure, 2) efforts by DRV leaders to implement Stalinist policies, and 3) materiel deficiencies.

French defenses have been strengthened not only by the invigorating leadership of General De Lattre, but also by his successful appeal to Paris for 15,000 reinforcements and by an increasing flow of US materiel. It may be presumed that the very successful use of napalm by French aviation during the first frontal assault staged by the DRV in January 1951 contributed to a lowering of enemy morale, and to the recent DRV decision to shift the tactical emphasis from seizure of territory to guerrilla warfare.

Although a certain "lack of combativeness" among the troops was noted in a recent DRV broadcast, the trend toward demoralization is better established in the case of the civilian population than among the military.

Discontent among civil officials was openly admitted by the DRV radio in a June 6 broadcast, which criticized those functionaries who are "losing sight of the fact that our resistance is integrated in the world movement for peace." It is significant that the focus of difficulty is the point where the Stalinist aims of the DRV leaders diverge from the nationalist impulses of the DRV rank and file.

Further evidence of discontent among nominal DRV adherents is the recent defection of several prominent Vietnamese from the ranks of Ho Chi Minh, including a deputy of the DRV "National Assembly" and the wife of the DRV civil chief in South Vietnam. Various reports testify that such defections would be more numerous but for DRV police surveillance and for continuing mistrust of French intentions. The tendency of DRV officials to defect is probably attributable in large part to the greatly accelerated tempo of Stalinization which was introduced early this year by the central authorities.

The first step in this process was the establishment of the "Vietnam Workers Party" in mid-February as the successor to the nationalist-tainted Viet Minh League. Since that time a strenuous effort has been made to force the facts of the situation in Vietnam to fit Stalinist theory; for instance, the Viet Minh insists on the leadership of the "revolutionary working class" despite the fact that such a class scarcely exists in Vietnam and, to the extent that it does exist, is located mostly within areas controlled by the French.

The corollary of this policy has been an effort to dissuade the peasantry from acting on its desire for agrarian reform until the "working class" is in a position to supervise such reform. This triumph of theory over facts is not calculated to enlist the active support of intellectuals or of the peasants themselves, who number about nine-tenths of the population.

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A further grievance of the general population in DRV-controlled areas and a threat to the military effectiveness of the DRV forces is the growing scarcity of essential goods. Indications of this problem are monetary inflation, a continuing shortage of food and ammunition, and a high incidence of disease.

Efforts of the DRV to expand its armed forces have aggravated the plight of the peasants. There are numerous intimations in DRV media that the manpower shortage is a pressing one; one broadcast expressly states that the people have been worked to the point of exhaustion; another urges that women be trained to plow the fields and repair machinery. In connection with recent clearing operations in the Tonkin Delta, French sources state that the population was eager to put itself under French protection and to testify against "Viet Minh" elements. Recent DRV military policy has been directed largely toward ensuring, by force or by stealth, a movement of rice from the fertile French-held Delta to the rice-poor highlands.

The foregoing information highlights some of the vulnerabilities of the DRV. It does not warrant a conclusion that the DRV organization is facing an imminent collapse. War-weariness and suspicion of the essentially anti-national character of Stalinist policies among the DRV-controlled population, however, are DRV weaknesses which could be exploited by a vigorous political campaign advocating truly national interests.

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